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Accessing the medieval:
Disability and distance in Anna Gurney's search for St Edmund
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Figure 1. Artist unknown. Date unknown. Miss Anna Gurney. Photographic print. Norwich: Norfolk Museums Collections, NWHCM: 1892.28.

Helen Brookman

Department of Liberal Arts, King's College, London, UK.

Abstract: What can be achieved by putting scholarly bodies back into disembodied disciplinary histories? Pursuing a feminist historiography of medieval studies, this article seeks to understand how the scholarly practices of pioneering medievalist Anna Gurney (1795–1857) were enacted through her body, the difference of which was doubly marked within her spaces and networks as disabled and female. Considering intersections of geography and class as well as gender and disability, I trace Gurney's search for the life of St Edmund, mapping how the spatial and temporal distances of the scholarly search are experienced differently by complex and varied scholarly bodies. I show how Gurney's discursive, practical, and creative strategies for facilitating proximity to the medieval constitute a 'praxis of access,' which generates and vivifies a reciprocal relationship with the object of her knowledge.

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What can be achieved by putting bodies back into disembodied disciplinary histories? How can attention to scholarly bodies - especially non-normative ones - facilitate feminist counter-histories of medieval studies? In recent decades, the discipline has sought to uncover and critique the history of its own formation, a project of increasing urgency for present-day medievalists as we seek to redress the oppressions and exclusions of the modern field. Drawing on approaches originated by feminists in philosophy of science, geography, and disability studies, this piece will seek to overturn the unconscious reproduction of the scholar as, in Bonnie Smith's terms, 'spiritualized and invisible' (Smith, 1998, 2). It will follow Elizabeth Grosz's call to 'know the knower', considering the questions produced by the contemplation of her body within the spaces and institutions of scholarship, and thus critiquing 'the inability of Western knowledges to conceive their own processes of (material) production, processes that simultaneously rely on and disavow the role of the body' (Grosz, 1993, 193, 187). Pursuing a feminist historiography of medieval studies, we can view practices of knowing as practices of living, being, and feeling, in order to unpick the politics of medievalist knowledge production in the nineteenth century, and thus to reckon with their inheritances in present day.

My subject is Anna Gurney (1795-1857), who is best remembered for her pioneering *Literal Translation of the Saxon Chronicle* (1819). She pursued a broad range of intellectual interests across her career - philology, archaeology, natural history - but was known especially for her study of Old English and Old Norse. An activist in the causes of anti-slavery, anti-animal cruelty, and maritime rescue, Gurney was a woman of considerable political and intellectual agency, who lived until 1838 with her female partner. Having had polio at ten months old, Gurney used a wheelchair. This article will explore how Anna Gurney enacted her scholarly praxis through her physical body, the difference of which was doubly marked within her spaces and networks as disabled and female. It will consider the intersection of material and social factors, class and geography as well as gender and disability.

Particularly, I seek to trace the thrills and frustrations of a single scholarly search for the life of St Edmund. It is recorded in a short correspondence (of which only her half survives, in the Library of the Society of Friends) with Gurney's brother, the prominent antiquarian, aspiring poet, and Vice-President of the Society of Antiquaries, Hudson Gurney (1775-1864), conducted from her Norfolk cottage in March 1850 as she considered reprinting a comparative edition of her *Literal Translation*. Her 'hunting out' of Edmund's history represents a mundane but fundamental scholarly practice: the search for a viable textual reference. The specific scholarly practices of nineteenth-century medieval studies survive, via their institutionalization in late-

century positivism, as 'the techniques that many medievalists regard as the mainstay of academic medieval studies today', an exclusionary inheritance that Kathleen Biddick urges us to recognize and critique (Biddick, 1998, 2). In the nineteenth century there were particular barriers of access to the required training, networks, and research materials, which were gate-kept – directly and indirectly - on grounds of gender, race, disability, and class. Sustained attention to her quotidian scholarly activity allows me to situate Gurney within her scholarly environment and recreate, immersively, her embodied experience of pursuing scholarship: 'For feminists, the everyday routines traced by women are never unimportant, because the seemingly banal and trivial events of the everyday are bound into the power structures that limit and confine women' (Rose, 1993, 17). I follow Gurney down a familiar research rabbit-hole to explore an aspect of her scholarship as a disabled woman - conducting a search at a distance and by proxy - to explore what I call her 'praxis of access'.

Explicitly developing the feminist understanding that 'all knowledge is situated [and] that people in marginal social positions enjoy an epistemological privilege that allows them to theorize society differently from those in dominant social locations', Tobin Siebers' foundational work in disability studies theorizes a 'complex embodiment that values disability as a form of human variation' (Siebers, 2008, 25). Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's field-forming work in feminist disability studies 'finds disability's significance in interactions between bodies and their social and material environments', conceiving disability as both 'a vector of socially constructed identity and a form of embodiment' (Garland-Thomson, 2005, 1557-9). Understanding Gurney's situated knowledge, her 'sitpoint' (to take the term that Garland-Thomson uses to challenge the ableist assumptions of standpoint theory, Garland-Thomson, 2002, 21), requires attention to the spaces Gurney inhabited, her everyday practices within them, and the ways her subjectivity was constituted discursively, by those around her and in her own self-representations. Thus, I hope to trace - without reinscribing the reductive or essentializing limitations that society imposes on sexed and impaired bodies - how the material and discursive effects of gender and disability inform Gurney's scholarly process. I position Gurney as a knowing subject, and her body - one that 'violate[s] the normative standards and expectations of bodily form and function' - as a site and medium of knowledge (Garland-Thompson, 2005, 1558). As Martha Stoddard Holmes has explored, working around the 'fictions of affliction' imposed upon her, a disabled writer can

deploy 'narrative and rhetorical strategies to transform…her cultural position into a source of power, even if the power is tenuous and provisional' (Stoddard Holmes, 2004, 135).

Therefore, rather than revealing how the imbricated ideologies of gender and ability impacted on the development of Gurney's career, my focus is more restorative: to understand the discursive, practical, and creative manoeuvres that constitute her 'praxis of access'. I build on this situated understanding to consider how Gurney's perspective produces a particular relationship with the Middle Ages (in this case, a ludic fantasy of St. Edmund as a revenant collaborator in her research process). This will allow me to measure how the distances governing access to the medieval for gendered and disabled bodies impinge on the relationship between the modern knowing subject and the medieval known object, and how scholarly praxis, working across these distances, can generate and vivify it.

Gurney was always closely associated with Northrepps Cottage, at Overstrand, near Cromer, in Norfolk, which was her home from 1825 until her death in 1857. She lived there with the woman she called her 'faithful and beloved Partner' (

A. Gurney, 1857, 315v), Sarah Maria Buxton, until the latter's death in 1838, after which, 'although she had frequently intimate friends staying with her she never again had what she used to call another "partner"' (D. Gurney, 1857, 5). In 1833, Anna wrote a poem, 'Thoughts on our 8 years at the Cottage', reflecting on how central their home was to their shared lives - and their self-defined relationship - as unmarried and childless women: 'We came, enamoured of our barren choice,/We Partners came to work and to rejoice/"Pleasant the lives" to us, & care forgot/We made our Eden of the desert spot' (Gurney, 1833, 9). The Cottage was also the site of Gurney's political activism, where she played a hidden role as author of the final report of the Aborigines Select Committee in 1837 (Elbourne, 2006). Together, Gurney and Sarah were known as the 'Cottage Ladies', and, when Sarah died, Anna was invariably 'Anna Gurney of Northrepps Cottage'. As Kathryn Gleadle describes, '[a]ssociating Gurney with the cottage was a rhetorical device which shifted the potentially disruptive meanings of Gurney's life to the neutral signifier of a physical location' (Gleadle, 2009, 244).

In her frontispiece to her *Literal Translation of the Saxon Chronicle*, Gurney - seeking a favourable reception for her 'limited impression' (whose publication unfortunately coincided with a 'much more complete' version by the Rawlinsonian Professor of Anglo-Saxon) - described herself as 'a Lady in the Country who only had access to the Printed Texts' (Gurney,

1819, frontispiece). She emphasizes her sex, her rural location, and her lack of access to manuscripts, positioning herself with rhetorical modesty to soften the impudence of an unknown twenty-three-year-old woman seeking to compete with the Oxford Professor. Although Gurney never published widely, nor or held any academic or public position, she continued to engage in scholarly work throughout her life, and built private intellectual networks through which she disseminated it (Brookman, 2016, n.p.). She was elected as the first female member of both the British Archaeological Association (1845) and the Philological Society (1847).

By the time Gurney began her search for St Edmund in 1850, Northrepps Cottage offered an impressive research environment. The inventory of Gurney's library made at her death reveals an astounding collection of books and journals, valued at £585.16, including thousands of volumes on diverse subjects from botany to Egyptology, among an extensive collection of philological and antiquarian materials, especially relating to Britain and Scandinavia. It contained both increasingly outdated eighteenth-century works and more cutting-edge scholarship, English and continental (she read Grimm, Bopp, Diefenbach, and Müller as well as Hickes, Suhm, Lye & Manning, and Turner).

As well amassing an extensive private collection, she was an avid borrower. She was a member of the Norwich public and city libraries and was listed as an annual subscriber to the London Library in the second catalogue, published in 1847. The Library, founded by Thomas Carlyle in 1841, had a subscription fee of 'six pounds entrance, and two pounds annually' and gave every member residing more than ten miles away from the General Post Office, London access to an extraordinary postal borrowing service, paying the 'carriage' to borrow books – 'not exceeding fifteen at any time' - for up to two months (Cochrane, 1847, xii). Anna Gurney thought highly of the London Library, believing it 'so good a collection [that it must have a volume she sought]' (Gurney, 1850a, 30 March 1850, 2/14, 2. All subsequent letters cited from Society of Friends Gurney MSS (Gurney, 1850a) unless otherwise stated). In July 1849, she writes to Hudson to discuss a new book, the *Iolo Mansucripts* (which had been published in 1848): she notes that he probably had a copy in London, being a subscriber to the Society for the Publication of Ancient Welsh Manuscripts, whereas she borrowed a copy from a 'Miss Chester' (17th July 1849, 2/9, 1). By March 1850, she had had her own copy, which she had 'picked up lately fr[om] a Catalogue for a guinea' (13th March, 1850, 2/11a, 3).

Although the British Museum reading room was used increasingly (but not commonly) by women throughout the period, there is no evidence that Gurney used it directly, although she was a friend of the Museum's Principal Librarian, Sir Henry Ellis, and he offered her assistance

in pursuing her inquiries. Regarding her search for Edmund, she noted in a letter, 'I must someday have a look at his Homily in the B.M.' (30th March 1850, 2/14c, 1) and considered that the 'beautiful penmanship' of the Icelanders would allow her to make notes on the Norse sources 'easily'; so, at the very least, she casually considered visiting the Museum and consulting manuscript material first-hand. The list of 'Anna's MSS' compiled on her death, which contains the titles of dozens of translations, comparative collations, papers, treatises, notes and other works, primarily focused on Old English and Old Norse literary, historical, and philological material, includes several 'M.S.S. copied in the British Museum' (although not the Life of St Edmund). She also had an extensive fossil collection, said by the palaeontologist Richard Owen to be 'the most instructive in Norfolk'; the novelist Amelia Opie wrote from the Cottage that 'Anna Gurney abounds in mammoth remains' (Opie, 1834, 171b). At Northrepps Cottage, Gurney declared herself 'as well off as I c[oul]d be out of the British Museum' (13th March 1850, 2/11a, 5).

In *The Sense of an Interior*, Diana Fuss reminds us that writing cannot be extricated from 'the complex particularities of its spatial and material origins' (Fuss, 2004, 2). She asks, 'How does a body move through space? How does the proximity to people and things shape interior life? How do light, color, texture, and temperature structure our ways of knowing?' She describes realizing, belatedly, that she was writing a book on disability, because 'distinct corporeal needs and histories structure every subject's relation to the domestic interior' (Fuss, 8). Similarly, my aim now is to reanimate the 'gestures, spaces, and habits' in which, as Roger Chartier notes, the practice of reading is always embodied, to understand Gurney's search for St. Edmund as a spatial praxis, informed by her complex embodiment and situated within domestic space (Chartier, 1992, 51). Gurney's impairment - paralysis of her lower body - and the 'great and frequent' pain she experienced in later life informed her movement within her home. As a child, Anna would often sit and move around on the floor (her cousin Catherine Gurney described her in one letter as 'busy on the floor as usual'), but as an adult she sat primarily in her wheelchair: another cousin, Daniel Gurney, described how, 'She became very stout, & wheeled herself about in a chair in the house, & out of doors was carried, or dragged in a chair by two menservants' (D. Gurney, 1857, 7). Northrepps Cottage was physically adapted to accommodate her needs, and adjustments made to the banisters on the main staircase can still be 'viewed' on a visit the Cottage in its current incarnation as Northrepps Cottage Country Hotel.

Contemporary biographical accounts frequently situate Gurney as a learned woman amid her library, drawing on stereotypes of disability to contrast 'the incapacity of her body' (while

also expressing surprise at its strength and activity) with her 'mind of every unusual power and energy'. In an obituary of Gurney, Sarah Austin describes how:

> When talking on her favourite subject—philology, she would suddenly and rapidly wheel away the chair in which she always sate and moved, to her well-stored bookshelves, take down a book, and return delighted to communicate some new thought or discovery (Austin, 1857, 639).

This gesture appears to give an insight into Gurney's particular bodily experience of her research environment and the comfortable facility with which she navigated it, manoeuvring nimbly to consult her reference sources without breaking conversation. This was no hermetic cell or quarantined sickroom but a porous space, poised between private and public, through which people and materials came and went. As her easy movement between verbal interlocutor and printed text indicates, her everyday praxis incorporates social interchange as much as quiet contemplation.

Yet further attention suggests that, rather than giving insight into Gurney's perspective, the descriptions of this characteristic gesture, which becomes a stock trope in biographical accounts, represent external constructions that produce reductive narratives of disability. Just as she is closely tied to her Cottage as a way of domesticating her otherwise troubling political agency and sexuality, these accounts associate her closely with the 'chair in which she always sate and moved' to control discursively the meanings afforded to her disruptive life and prostheticized body. Austin's account of Gurney was published in Charlotte Yonge's *Biographies of Good Women* (1862), and Yonge wrote her own edifying account of Gurney in her *Book of Golden Deeds* (1864). In her account of 'that crippled lady' with the 'intellect of the highest order', Yonge describes the same wheeling movement, shifting the emphasis to indicate Gurney's 'ready perception of the wants and wishes of others':

> Not only was her wheeled chair propelled in a moment to her bookshelves when she wanted a volume to illustrate her thought, but the moment she caught a friend's eye in search of any article at a little distance, her chair was turned in that direction, and the object was presented with infinite grace (Yonge, 1864, 257-258).

Here, the volubility and erudition of Austin's account is superseded by an image of Gurney as a moral exemplar of selfless altruism and generosity. Yonge's account is an overdetermined blend

of what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson identifies as the 'narrative of catastrophe' and 'the sentimental narrative' of disability, the former presenting disability as a 'dramatic, exceptional extremity' that that 'incites courage', and the latter seeing 'people with disabilities as occasions for narcissistic pity or lessons in suffering for those who imagine themselves as nondisabled' (Garland- Thomson, 2005, 1567–8). For travel writer George Borrow, to whom Gurney was a 'personage… whom he had always a desire to see', the same wheeling gesture preceded the retrieval of an Arabic grammar, which he then tried to 'decipher' as she 'talked to him continuously', 'asking for explanation of some difficult point', until he 'threw down the book and ran out of the room'; his account presents an exaggerated nightmare of garrulous and exacting female authority, the idiosyncrasy of her gesture reinforcing the unnaturalness of her intellectual formidability (Upcher, 1893, 129). For those to whom she became known by reputation in the 1840s and 1850s, her attraction was founded in the intersection of her remarkable female learnedness and her conspicuousness as a wheelchair user. In her cabinet of curiosities, Anna Gurney became a spectacle of curiosity herself.

To move beyond these external constructions to gain her authentic self-perspective is difficult - she did not write explicitly about her impairment, nor reflect extensively on her experiences as a scholar - but passing comments in her letters can give us a partial sense of her embodied experience. We can picture her (as in a family sketch) sitting in her wheelchair at her

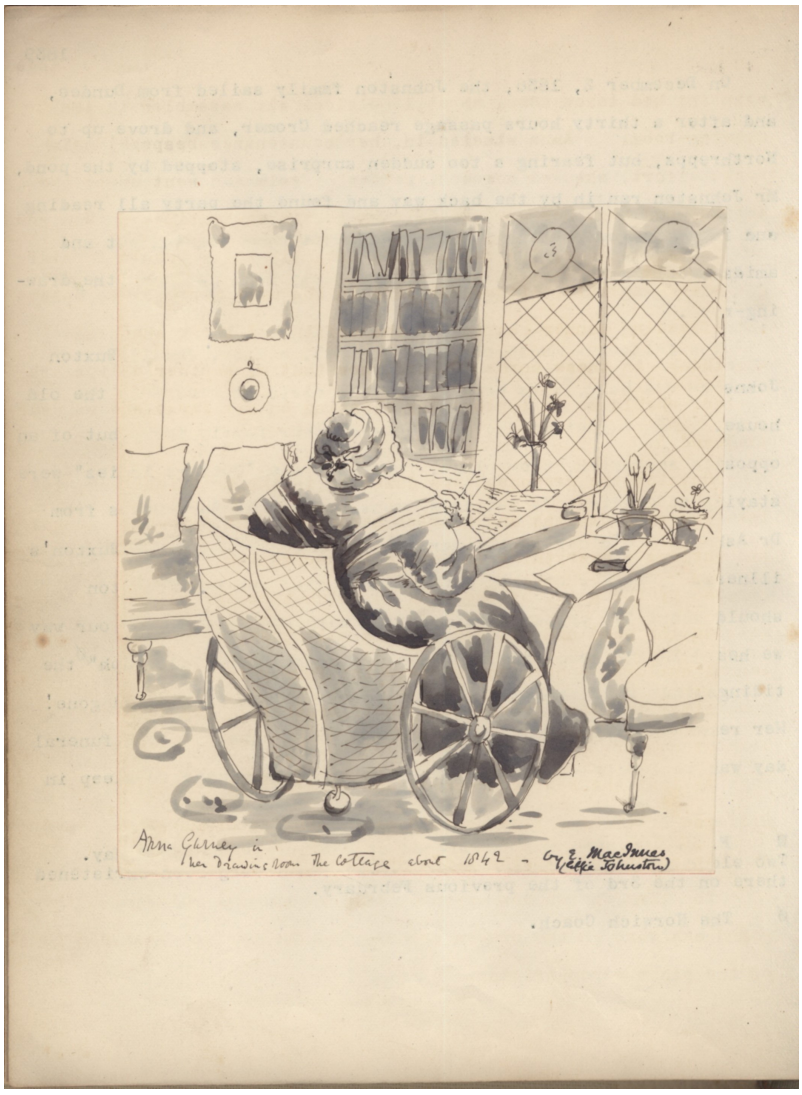

Figure 2. E. MacInnes. c. 1842. Anna Gurney in her drawing room The Cottage about 1842. From R.H.J. Gurney, 1895. Reproduced with permission of Simon Gurney.

desk, with pen, ink, and blank paper at close reach, surrounded by her well-stocked library. She is opening a book; sitting back to read a passage; leafing through her papers; scribbling notes. She comes across a letter from her brother and breaks off her studies to respond: 'How this letter got amongst my papers I do not know ^but^ at least I know it ought not to have got there' (13th March 1850, 2/11a, 1). The exchange between siblings blurs constantly between personal and scholarly matters. As well as her antiquarian notes and queries on sagas, coins, and etymologies, they record Gurney's daily experiences and activities: her frustrations at her perceived incapacities; her preoccupations with social gossip and legal matters; and her reflections on her local surroundings, especially the changing Norfolk landscape in an unseasonably cold March.

The letters tell us where and how she reads and writes. Gurney's slender *Literal Translation* had been printed in 1819, in her words, 'in a form, which, it is conceived, may render it convenient for reference'. Gurney has a precise focus on the physical dimensions of her reading material, habitually stating whether the books she mentions are in folio, quarto, octavo, or duodecimo ('I fear they are only in folio', 14th May 1848, 2/6a, 3) and noting their usability and portability ('The volume divides exactly & ^the parts^ all quite brought within easily usable comparts', 28th March 1850, 2/13a; 'it w[oul]d make too bulky a work' (13th March 1850, 2/11a, 2). There are implicit considerations in each description: can they be sent in the post? be read comfortably in a chair? Her only criticism of the London Library was that you could not 'read at your own comfort & certainly not to other peoples edification, in books that you could not mark' (14th May 1849, 2/6a, 3). Of course, any reader, especially a bibliographically literate Victorian, attends to such bookish affordances: her friend Sir Francis Palgrave cites Dr Johnson's statement that 'Books that you may carry to the fire, and hold readily in your hand, are the most useful after all' (Palgrave, 1831, vii). But these considerations are magnified for a reader with physical impairments.

Dominika Bednarska argues that 'accommodating disability poses fundamental challenges to [present-day] ideologies of work and notions of what it means to use time and life productively' (Bednarska, 2009, 166). The same is true for the nineteenth century. 'I am afraid I shall lose too much time 'en feuilletant' with the excuse of hunting for grains of history', Gurney writes, 'however [in] this rheumatic weather, it is comfortable to have a book to turn over without being required to do much' (Tuesday eve, 19th March 1850, 2/12b, 7) It is striking that she describes spending her time not 'lost in thought', but *en feuilletant,* 'in leafing through'. The activity - not requiring any strenuous exertion - is a 'comfort' for cold and pain. Yet, she experiences guilt for 'los[ing] time' in these distractions:

> I almost despair first from having ^become^ thoroughly convicted & convinced of utter dullness of head & then because of my weakness of hands. In Truth I do find myself very inefficient in every way - still, having you to look to for clarifying my attempts I sh[oul]d like to fancy myself employed in this way (13th March 1850, 2/11a, 6-7).

Here we can see how her doubts about her intellectual and physical capabilities interact: 'dullness of head' and 'weakness of hands' conspiring to make her 'inefficient'. Such anxiety is only stemmed by her authorizing appeal to her brother: it is Hudson's legitimizing oversight in 'clarifying' her thoughts that enables her to consider herself 'employed' and not just dilettantishly

leafing. Commenting on some 'capital books…a most valuable present' that Hudson had sent to her, she states: 'I only wish I may be able to turn them in any measure to the accounts that you & they deserve but inefficiency seems written on my attempts. However I find the looking up things very pleasant' (28th March 1850, 2/13a, 1). Such ambivalence about the status of brain-work as labour was widespread in the industrialized nineteenth-century: the scholar reading studiously and the idler reading for pleasure might look identical. The domestic sphere and the workplace were often one and the same for the scholar (as they were for women labourers more broadly). For disabled women, who are more likely to need the comfort of spaces primarily associated with rest and relaxation, the demarcation between the sites of leisure and study is especially blurred. 'I get so acheful towards even[ing],' Gurney notes, 'that I go to bed [early] & then get a comfortable time for reading' (14th May 1849, 2/6b, 1).

The Reverend Edward Hoare was keen to stress in Gurney's eulogy that she did not conform to idle female stereotypes: 'What a contrast did she present to the listless, fanciful, and indolent novel reader upon the sofa! How manfully did she grapple with one language after another!' (Hoare, 1857, 19). The value of academic labour relies upon the individual's capacity to conceive of themselves as a working scholar, a subject position that was far less accessible to women. Yet while Gurney's comments indicate genuine ambivalence about her status and success, they also form part of her ongoing rhetorical self-positioning, itself a functional element of her scholarly praxis.

Through her letters, we can trace how, in early 1850, Gurney became particularly interested in the martyring of St. Edmund by the Vikings. Edmund's death was recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle annal for 870 and, as his cult re-emerged in the tenth century, his Latin *passio* was written by Abbo of Fleury and then paraphrased in Old English by Ælfric. These saints' lives tell of Edmund's gruesome martyring: he was tied to a tree, whipped, and shot with arrows or spears until, like St Sebastian, he resembled a hedgehog with bristles. Edmund's severed head (hidden in undergrowth by the departing Vikings) was guarded by a wolf, miraculously shouting out 'Here!, here!, here!' until it was found by his searching followers and reunited with his body. Upon later exhumation of his body, his wounds were found to have healed and his head to have reattached to his body. St Edmund, representing the 'Victorian archetype of manly courage', was a figure of increasing popular interest and commemoration in the mid-nineteenth-century, especially following the publication of Thomas Carlyle's *Past and Present* in 1843 (inspired partly by the 1840

publication of the *Chronicle of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds,* which Gurney also read) and the discovery of a 'Danish arrow-head' in an ancient oak tree in Hoxne, Suffolk in 1848 which 'verified' its status as the site of Edmund's martyrdom (Young, 2015, 170). In *Past and Present*, Abbot Samson dreams of St Edmund's dead body, around which the Abbey was built: in Carlyle's work, it is 'sacred' and 'stiff', 'a temple where the Hero-soul once was and now is not'. Gurney's own interest in St. Edmund reflects a localizing, East Anglian element in her medievalism that also produced her anonymously published translation of 'A Saxon homily on St. Neot' (1820) and her article on 'Norfolk Words' (1855).

On 13th March 1850, Gurney was embarking upon a new scheme to produce a revised edition of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 'with notes from the Sagas [which] w[oul]d be a very new thing…there is piles of Materials for such a scheme, as we talk of' (13th March 1850, 2/11a, 5). A version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle had been published in 1847 by J. A. Giles, a highly derivative scholar, in which his translation was 'borrowed' from Gurney's 1819 translation. She ponders to Hudson whether Giles' publication 'superseded my reprinting mine', noting 'I do not see that it w[oul]d, as it is only in the latter part that it professes to have followed our version' (13th March 1840, 2/11a, 1). Following a 'very welcome and valuable letter' from Hudson, she declares herself 'quite stirred up' to 'prepare for your inspection a specimen of the notes that I cd furnish'. She had already 'generally marked the passages' and set out her method: 'the way will be to look thro[ugh] one set of Sagas ^& Annals^ after another for a given period' (3-4).

After receiving his response, she tells him that 'You have given a motive to hunt up information bearing on Saxon Hist[or]y' and begins to focus her pursuit (19th March 1850, 2/12a, 2). 'Neither', she writes, 'in any of the published homilies that I have seen, nor in the Blickling MS do I remember any on the King St Edmund. His history wd be worth making out & I see in Wanley's Cat: there are several MSS. of his homily existing - I never knew what was the real story of the arrow head found in the tree under which he was supposed to have been shot' (2/12b, 5-6). She notes especially that there is 'One "Codex" containing the homily on St Edmund in the British Museum'. On the 28th of March, she is evidently still searching for Edmund: 'I cannot find any printed homily of the king St. Edmund. This is a portion of history I should much like to hunt out' (3).

By 30th March she is showing signs of exasperation: 'If the King St Edmund is not to be found in the Acta Sanctorum (& if he is, I do not know that I can get at him, for the copy in the London library I see does not come down to Nov. in which month is his day) I must someday have a look at his Homily in the B. Museum' (30th March 1850, 2/14c, 1). On 6th April, still with no reference, she resorted to sending Hudson a comic poem, chiding him for his ineffectuality

(Gurney, 1850b). A month later, Hudson successfully fulfilled her request: 'You have given me ^an^ excellent reference for 'the king St. Edmund'. Thanks' (Monday 22nd April, 2/16c, 1). The letters offer no further information about the reference Hudson sent or any further research she then may have pursued.

Her comments reveal her persistence and determination: she speaks of 'hunting out' his history and her desire to 'get at him'. Unable to locate the reference in her own collection of printed books or via her access to the London Library, she engages in an alternative mode of scholarship: using Hudson as a proxy to search from a distance, in his own vast library and those he visited in London. Throughout the exchange, Gurney's manoeuvres are first deferentially and obliquely suggestive ('His history would be worth making out'), and then playfully pleading ('Pray, Hunt, and Hearken, Brother Dear!'), as she seeks to elicit the information she needs. She positions herself as junior to her brother, flatteringly reliant on his superior expertise ('I want to know whether you think I have made a bit of a discovery') (30th March 1850, 2/14a, 4). On other occasions is confident and assured, recommending he use the London Library (which lay mere feet away from his home on St. James' Square) with familiar ease: 'I never have all my 15 volumes out - & Robert might run over to the corner of the Square (number 12/.) [and] fetch you out a couple of volumes at a time in my name' (14th May 1849, 2/6a, 4). Similarly, she slips between claiming sole authorship of her *Literal Translation* ('whether it supersedes my reprinting mine') and positioning Hudson as her co-author ('it professes to have followed our version').

As well as relying on a close-knit local circle of family and friends and her wider networks of scholarly contacts, Gurney could draw on substantial financial resources to pay personal servants, who facilitated her everyday life and her scholarly activity (more than many, 'people with disabilities…live in webs of interdependent relationships', Godden and Hsy, 2013, 337). As Daniel Gurney describes, 'Her fortune which was very ample enabled her to retain around her most faithful & attached attendants.' She named several of these in her will: 'my attached and trusty Hannah Roper'; 'my faithful Sarah Rushmore (whom I commonly call Lucy)'; 'my valued servant Emily Greenaker'; 'my valued servant John Spink' 'my valued servant Stephen Rogers' (Gurney, 1857, 317v). In managing her scholarly operations, with Gurney in Northrepps Cottage acting as covert director and Hudson in London as her scholarly proxy, she employs an evident skill at being diplomatically, wittily, and effectively directive, which she had developed as a wealthy disabled woman of extraordinary – although carefully negotiated and ambivalently claimed - agency.

Through such manoeuvres, she deploys her family network and resources in a notable inversion of the more familiar roles for nineteenth-century women as *amanuenses* or helpmeets to

their husbands, brothers, or fathers. The project of recovering women's contributions often requires centering such women - whose labour is often visible (if at all) only in the acknowledgements rather than on the title page - and revealing how much existing scholarship should rightfully be attributed to them. But, in the nineteenth century, 'invalidism could be a source of empowerment for female intellectuals' (Gleadle, 2009, 247); for Gurney, her disability freed her from expectations regarding marriage and children, and afforded her liberty in choosing her intimate relationships; spending her time on scholarly activity; developing and deploying political and intellectual agency; and receiving, rather than solely offering, assistance. Time-geographer Torsten Hägerstrand has described how human movement is governed by 'capability constraints' ('the physical limits to movement'); 'coupling constraints' ('which compel people to come together at certain times and in locations'); and 'authority constraints' ('social rules banning or encouraging certain temporospatial behaviour') (Rose, 1993, 21-22). As a disabled woman, Gurney encountered capability constraints emerging from her physical impairments; coupling constraints as structured by her familial and social networks and their geographical distribution; and authority constraints stemming from gendered expectations of her as a scholarly woman. The physical constraints she experienced compelled her to rely more fully than others on forms of assistance and collaboration throughout her life; she developed successful enabling strategies which were then easily and naturally extended into her scholarly activity - for example, through a casual and habitual conscription of friends and family as research assistants and copyists - as her interests and intellectual authority developed. The strategies for overcoming capability constraints could be repurposed to tackle authority constraints. Along with her wealth, class, and forceful personality, being a woman who required assistance for everyday living empowered Gurney to be a woman who could request, negotiate, and, in some contexts, command assistance for her scholarly projects, in a mode experienced more commonly by her male counterparts.

Having traced the various paths of this specific query, back and forth, in her letters, we can also begin to chart the broader lines of enquiry that constitute the geographies of her medieval studies. Gurney sits at the centre, 'energetically superintending', as she did in her maritime rescue work, when, in the event of shipwreck, she would be carried to the shore to direct operations ('B.', *Athenaeum* 1857, 1269). The lines of her correspondence networks run between Northrepps Cottage and Hudson at St. James Square; or Henry Ellis at the British Museum; or Sir Francis Palgrave in Yarmouth. We can also visualise the routes taken by the books destined to furnish her drawing room, which travelled to Northrepps Cottage from the London Library via the

General Post Office; from friends and local libraries; from learned societies and booksellers' catalogues.

A key axis here is that between rural Norfolk and the centres of learning clustered in the metropolis. The London Library's generous lending policy reflects just one way that Victorian scholars managed such distances with great facility. Two letters sent to Anna Gurney from Sir Henry Ellis on 19th and 20th December 1853 (now in the Ellis Papers at the British Library) offer another illuminating example of long-distance intellectual exchange. Ellis begins by thanking Gurney for the 'beautiful Turkey…which arrived safe here on Saturday morning' and consults with her on 'a point upon which I have long thought of writing to you' (whether, based on her 'extensive reading in Northern Literature', she could advise on 'Anglo-Saxon coins found in the Countries of the North'; Ellis, 1853, 280). His second letter notes that his 'thanks for your splendid Present of the Turkey must have crossed the Letter received this morning, upon its way to North Repps' (Ellis, 1853, 282). Gurney, having won favour with her classic Norfolk landowner's Christmas gift, had written to Ellis in the meantime with a query about 'cuneiform and hieroglyphic learning'. He advises that to learn of the 'latest discoveries', she should consult the 'last Numbers of the Asiatic Society's Transactions', which are, 'all of portable size'. He then notes that the son of the Assistant Secretary of the Asiatic society is a transcriber at the Museum 'through whom I can obtain anything, or make any further Enquiry you may wish…my services are at your service.' The letters show the extent to which this friendship - through which Gurney achieved two of her few publications of later life, letters to Ellis which were printed in the journal of the Society of Antiquaries, *Archaeologia* - served to facilitate her enquiries (Brookman, 2016). Ellis then shares a new way she may be able to pursue her queries from a distance: 'I don't know whether you may be aware that Photography is now successfully applied to copying of Cuneiform Inscriptions…We have even just set up a Photographic House upon the Roof of the Museum.' He notes that the technology will serve not just for Assyrian cylinders but 'for Vases and Antiquities of every kind, or almost for whatever we may apply it to.'

Through the combination of a frequent and fast postal service and innovative applications of new technology, Ellis offers new ways for Gurney as a geographically isolated scholar to gain access to accurate facsimiles of the latest archaeological discoveries. As with contemporary applications of digital technologies in archival research, such advancements can be utilized by any scholar for convenience and speed when research materials lie at a distance, but are of increasing benefit the further the user is from the metropolitan centre, and have particular potential for increasing accessibility for disabled scholars. The latest issues of learned journals and society transactions; transcriptions of manuscripts; recent editions of sagas and annals;

photographs of cutting-edge archaeological finds; and direct lines to key contacts who could pursue enquiries on her behalf: if Gurney had to make her own British Museum at Northrepps Cottage, it was no pale imitation.

Thus far, I have situated Gurney's search in the material environment of her home and witnessed her pragmatic deployment of her social and financial resources to overcome spatial constraints; the final section of this article considers a more creative aspect of her medievalist practice. In a playful poem (newly discovered in private Gurney family papers), she expands the figure of 'hunting' St Edmund (a semantic field that comes naturally to one of country habits), aligning her brother's task with the original searches for the saint, whose story she clearly knew well. Dated 6th April, 1850, the poem was written after she had mentioned Edmund to her brother three times but before she received her reference (Gurney, 1850b, 165) [My discovery of this previously unknown poem was enabled by the generosity of Simon Gurney and family in digitizing and sharing their privately-owned papers]:

> In the year seventy, plus eight hundred,
> Edmund was martyred – Suffolk plunder'd –
> Well had it been for Edmund's skin,
> And for those Danes that did the sin,
> If the grim Vikings, in the dark,
> Had shot, like you, beside the mark –
> For 'twas the twentieth of November
> Those Heathens did the saint dismember –
> His head into the woods they flung,
> Not thus could silence Edmund's tongue –
> Oh, that this member bodiless
> Again would speak from shelf or press!
> Not from green leaves, but leaves of vellum,
> Would lift its voice again, & tell 'em
> His whereabouts, with accent clear,
> Crying, as whilome, "Here! Here! Here!",

Pray hunt, and hearken, Brother dear!

Yr AG

The scholarly pursuit is initially a violent one, with Hudson, unlike the 'grim Vikings', missing his mark (perhaps by sending her an erroneous reference). She then transposes the unexpected miracle of Edmund's passion – that the disembodied head of saint is able to speak and announce its location – onto the desired scholarly encounter, urging Hudson to take the part of a loyal follower and find Edmund.

The desired object shimmers obliquely throughout the poem: the reference for the Homily is conflated with the text of the Homily, which is conflated with Edmund himself, or, rather, with his head. While his reference lies hidden, Edmund is a 'member bodiless', grotesquely disembodied, whom she desires to announce himself in an audible and tangible physical form. Just as the saint's corpse is miraculously reunited with his head, Gurney wishes for a restitution, in which the preserved Edmund could be found, located, 'got at', in textual form. Gurney's fascination with Edmund's severed head places her medievalist impulse in distinct contrast to the masculine Victorian crisis identified by Kathleen Biddick as the 'melancholy for work', in which the body of the Gothic peasant - more specifically the 'hands' of imagined Gothic handicraft - 'functions as the metaphor for elite male sorrow over the radical disembodiment attending industrialization' (Biddick, 1998, 13). These hands are 'a ground and site of labour', as writers such as Ruskin and Morris 'mourn for the alienated physical labor of the medieval scribal craft, the scribe's writing hand' (43).

Despite her frustrations with her physical incapacity and her anxieties about her status as a scholarly worker, it is not quite this same tradition of 'elite male sorrow' for the loss of physical labour that Gurney's fantasy seeks to perform. Her desired revenant is not writing hands but a speaking head, to which she gives sentience and agency. Although Gurney 'despaired' at her own 'weakness of hands', she had numerous pragmatic strategies to overcome this obstacle: she could direct, in person and from a distance, other proxy hands to perform her searches. But her struggle to have the space and social permission to think and to speak represented a career-spanning challenge. Invoking the return of Edmund's head, she ventriloquizes his clear, commanding words and with them his royal and holy authority. Rather than melancholy for work, the poem is a fantasy of voice.

Something as minor and quotidian as an elusive reference is here imagined as a living revenant of the medieval past, offering the thrill of a hunt and the healing promise of location and restitution. Gurney captures in hasty doggerel her fantasy of the moment when, after a

frustrating process extended over a number of weeks and conducted across a hundred miles, the reference would finally be found. The poem evidently had its desired effect; Hudson then sent her the 'excellent reference'. Although it is the scholar who hunts – in Gurney's case, vicariously through her brother – the process is conceived as one of mutual desire, in which the hunted knowledge expresses its own longing to be found. In Gurney's curious verse, she establishes a relationship between the modern desiring-to-know subject and the medieval object of knowledge, in which sought objects 'speak again from shelf or press' and the scholar must 'hearken' to find them. Her revivified Edmund – scarcely resembling Carlyle's stiff, sacred 'temple' - becomes another collaborator in the production of medievalist knowledge. The poem, with its focus on the location and embodiment of the agentic knowledge-object, and the difficulties and mishaps the knowledge search can entail, anticipates later feminist work (especially Donna Haraway's) by foregrounding specificity, playfulness, and untimely reciprocity, in modes of thought that would be suppressed by the universalizing master-narratives of the emerging positivist discipline.

In this intimate, informal context, the medieval past is not 'bound in rigid alterity', but shouts aloud to guide its own recovery (Biddick, 1998, 16). In 1850, Gurney sat on the threshold of specialisation; neither interior nor exterior to what would become the academic discipline of medieval studies. Her work was infused with new discoveries as quickly as the published works could find their way to her Cottage, but in this pre-disciplinary moment she was still free of strict *dicta* of periodization and method, free to move back and forth between scholarly and imaginative modes of knowing the medieval past. Moreover, her jolly poem is not only an idle fantasy, but a functional and productive part of her scholarly practice: a research method. The poem is a performative utterance, facilitating her work in the most practical sense. Rather than melancholy, the prevailing mood is grotesque comedy, its levity essential for navigating the sensitivities of nudging her older brother into doing her bidding. Rick Godden describes how disability can be accompanied by a 'feeling of existing in a different, separate temporality from others'; he advocates for a generative understanding of the untimely, in which disabled scholars can use new media to find 'new ways for fashioning shared temporalities' (Godden, 2011, 270; 276). In a similar manner, using media of 1850, Gurney's poem serves as a technology of access, one that overcomes the barriers of both physical and temporal distance.

Anna Gurney's hunt for St. Edmund, conducted from Northrepps Cottage, produces a chart for the various distances of the knowledge search. Mapping these distances allows me to explore how they are produced differently for and experienced differently by complex and varied scholarly bodies within their working environments. Such variations go to the heart of the disciplinary project, prompting us to reconsider the inequitable materialities and geographies of medievalist knowledge production. Gurney's movements reveal the epistemological distances that each scholarly body must travel on its hunt for knowledge. The various spatial gaps that different bodies experience - between a scholar and her materials; her body and other bodies that assist her labour; hand and book; bed and desk; wheelchair and bookshelf; home and library; region and metropolis - are often left unmeasured. Yet they are each a practical counterpart to (and necessary enabler of) the intellectual journeys a scholar takes to traverse the chronological distances between knowing subject and knowledge object; past and present; medieval and modern.

In Gurney's praxis of access, she utilizes a range of strategies to facilitate proximity to the medieval: some practical, some discursive, some creative. She works across geographical and temporal distance to generate and vivify a reciprocal relationship with the object of her knowledge, and to enable the play and reproduction of the reference. Gurney - the 'Lady in the Country' who, in her *Literal Translation* of 1819, claimed to have merely 'access to the printed texts' – was drawn in later life to produce a comparative version (which, if ever realised, does not survive). As a rurally-located woman and as a wheelchair-user, she had an experiential appreciation of the value of making texts accessible for other scholars by eliminating the distances of the knowledge search, placing source in parallel alongside source - 'convenient for reference' - in a volume of portable size, which you could buy or borrow, and read, in your own home and at your own comfort.

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About the Author

Helen Brookman is Director of Liberal Arts and Reader in Liberal Arts and Interdisciplinary Education at King's College London. Her interests lie in medievalism and histories of medieval studies, particularly of women medievalists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and in

interdisciplinary education and innovative pedagogies. She is currently Deputy Director of the Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies at King's (E-mail: helen.brookman@kcl.ac.uk).

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